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Folk Lore in the Old Testament. Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law. By Sir JAMES GEORGE FRAZER. London, Macmillan and Company, 1918. — Three volumes: xxv, 566; xxi, 571; xxviii, 569 pp.

Coming at a time when thinking was mainly metaphysical, while the world was still testing the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer by the word of Holy Writ, Frazer's earlier works in the field of comparative religion struck at the doctrine of divine inspiration and played a large part in changing the controversy from a test of theory by theory to a test of theory by observed fact. With inductive method firmly established, as it is today, Frazer's latest product in the same field cannot be considered epoch-making.

Folk Lore in the Old Testament does not pretend to be the result of personal research. Rather, it is a reorganization of the voluminous published material collected by explorers, missionaries, archæologists and anthropologists, regarding the backward groups in all corners of the earth, with a chronological arrangement of biblical legend as framework.

Many of the data are admittedly crude. Explorers have physiography as their main interest and lack the intimate knowledge of the local language necessary to comprehend local traditions. Missionaries are prone to see in the folk-tale merely the evils of heathendom. Scientists, reaching the primitive group after the modernizing influences of other visitors have been at work, are unable to separate the indigenous legend from distorted fragments which have been borrowed from our own folk-lore.

The classification of the material is, of course, subject to the personal bias of the author. In many instances it will appear to the reader that data have been included which are quite foreign to the topic dealt with. This is particularly true of the chapter on "Ultimogeniture", where much of the material apparently has no relation to the Hebraic legend of Jacob and Esau, or even to the general subject of the section. When, as in the above instance, the author is launching a theory of his own, the introduction of extraneous material tends seriously to weaken the argument. In the main, however, the arrangement is excellent. For the usual arrangement by geographical area, it substitutes a classification of traditions according to the central idea, greatly facilitating comparative study. In conjunction with the copious index, it makes the material readily available to the student of primitive thought.

In the main the author is content with mere exposition, leaving the task of deduction to the reader, and seldom drawing conclusions himself. He does state an opinion in some instances, and it is in these places that the work seems weakest. The methodology of the field of folk-lore is almost as backward as are the groups from which the material is drawn. As yet the subject is still mainly in the classificatory stage, and it must be said that Frazer does little to raise it above that level.

Throughout the work Frazer proves himself a master in the use of English. Flashes of wit and satire punctuate what might easily be a dreary monotony of instances. The style, poetic always, and rising at times almost to the level of the saga, holds the reader's interest where the subject matter, otherwise presented, would become intolerably tedious.

For the student of comparative law and jurisprudence the volumes constitute an excellent source-book on rudimentary forms. While most of the material in Part IV deals solely with primitive taboos, there is much that is concerned with the fundamentals of common law and of procedure. For those interested in the religious beliefs and observances of barbarous groups the book is a well-organized body of material.

On reading *Folk Lore in the Old Testament*, one cannot fail to be impressed with the undeveloped state of the subject. Much sifting and resifting of the data, much organizing and rearrangement, is needed before the crude and imperfect mass of material now at hand can be converted into a coördinated body of knowledge. Many careful but fragmentary studies of comparative folk-lore have been made and published in various journals of anthropology. Recently Robert H. Lowie in his *Primitive Society* has rendered valuable service in assembling and systematizing the data already at our disposal. With a background of actual personal studies of existing forms and observances among backward peoples, it is possible for the anthropologist to analyze legend in the light of present-day survivals. It is to be hoped that many other scientifically-minded students of social origins may attack this large work, and that the subject may pass from the phase of arbitrary classification into that of logical generalization.

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